

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

'Timeslips' helps keep track of billable time

If you're a lawyer, accountant, consultant or any other professional who bills others for your time, you'll be happy to learn about "Timeslips," an amazing new program for IBM PCs and PC-compatible personal computers.

It takes much of the drudgery out of keeping track of billable time, allocating expenses to particular jobs and preparing monthly invoices.

Not only that, but it also prepares elaborate reports and graphs analyzing your time. And what's more, the program can be accessed while you're in the middle of another. At \$99.95, it's a bargain. Apparently, many people agree. More than 5,000 copies have been sold in the first few months that it's been available.

In this week's column, I describe how easy it is to use Timeslips, and next week I'll review some of its impressive reporting capabilities.

Assuming that the program has already been installed on your computer, here's what you do:

Let's say you're in the middle of another program such as WordPerfect or Lotus 1-2-3 and you want to set up a time slip for the job you are working on. First, you enter the Timeslips program by touching the Left-Shift and Alt keys simultaneously. Your current program is suspended, and a "slip" appears on your computer's screen. You fill in a description of the job and start the clock running. Then, by touching the Esc key twice, you can return to your original program. While you're working, the clock continues to run.

Now, let's say the telephone rings and one of your other clients is on the phone with a question. You want to stop the clock on the first job and begin timing the call. This is done by touching the Left-Shift and Alt keys again to bring back the previous slip. By touching the Down-Arrow or Up-Arrow keys on your keyboard, the time slip for your client on the phone is located.

And by touching the F-5 function key, the timing of the phone call begins. The timing of the previous job is automatically turned off when this is done.

Finally, when the phone call is over, you can go back to the previous slip to restart the timing on it by again hitting the F-5 key.

By these few actions, an exceptional amount of important data is captured. The computer has affixed the date and time to the phone call, and will now be able to summarize it along with the other charges to your client when a report and invoice are prepared.

Since your billing rate for each client was previously entered, all calculations will be done for you.

On the negative side, the program is relatively new, and the developers, North Edge Software Corp. of Hamilton, Mass., are still perfecting the program and making it easier to use. I have two quibbles that probably will be corrected later, but which are bothersome today.

First, while it's easy to use Timeslips after you know how, it takes much too long to learn how to use it when you first get started. I spent more than two hours struggling with the manual, fussing with the commands, and calling the company for help before being able to use it effectively.

Second, I discovered that if you want to make notes on a time slip while you are timing a phone call, the timer stops while you're making the notes! The company acknowledged this bug and indicated that it will fix it in future versions.

Despite the few drawbacks, Timeslips is exactly the type of program many people have been looking for. For some executives, it might justify having a computer handy all the time, just for this purpose. Next week, I'll discuss its reporting, graphing and invoicing features.



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